

NEST BOXES

Frequently asked questions

Is it okay to clean out nestboxes and what should I do with any unhatched eggs?

You can clean nestboxes outside the bird breeding season, between 1 August and 31 January. We recommend you do it in October or November.

It is illegal to keep any unhatched eggs. If there are unhatched eggs in the box, you can legally remove these between 1 August and 31 January, and you must throw them away.

Will sparrows use a nestbox?

House sparrows take readily to nestboxes. They nest in colonies, so if you place two or three in a row, making a sparrow terrace, they are more likely to be used. Nestboxes positioned high up under the eaves often deter sparrows from nesting in your roof.

What should I do about a nest in my roof?

You don't have to do anything about a nest in your roof. Many birds use roof spaces for nesting, generally doing no harm whilst there. Because all wild birds and their active nests are protected by law, it would be a criminal offence to remove or block off an active nest. We recommend that any roofing work is scheduled to be done outside the spring and summer months when birds are likely to be nesting.

The most frequent roof-nesters are starlings and house sparrows, both of which are red listed because of major population declines. You may also be lucky to have a swift nesting inside your roof, or have house martins build their mud nests outside, under the eaves.

If you have swifts nesting in your roof, please always allow them to continue to share your home. Swifts are quiet when inside the roof and cause no problems at all. They are suffering from a shortage of nesting sites, and any lost site can be very difficult to replace. House martins are amber listed because of their population decline, and should be allowed to nest wherever the droppings do not cause major problems.

Young starlings can be noisy during the last few days before fledging, and it is understandable that a nest above a bedroom can be a nuisance. If such cavities must be made unavailable to the birds, any repair work is best carried out during autumn or winter, when one can be sure that birds are not nesting. If you must block off nesting holes, please consider placing suitable nesting boxes under the eaves or in other suitable locations to give the birds an alternative nest site.

Is it legal to move or destroy active birds' nests?

Almost certainly no. All birds their nests and eggs are protected by law: the Wildlife & Countryside Act of 1981. This makes it an offence, with certain exceptions, to deliberately take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built. It is also illegal to take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

Can I cut down some shrubs during spring and summer?

Unless you can be absolutely sure that they are not being used by nesting birds then work of this nature is always best left until the autumn. Gardens are important habitat for a wide variety of species and many will nest in shrubs, hedging and undergrowth.

The breeding period coincides with the busiest time of the year for gardeners but it is vital that great care is also taken to protect birds and their nests.

Should I knock down house martin nests before they return next year?

You don't need to remove a house martin nest because the martins will re-use it when they return next year. You can remove nests if you need to do maintenance work or painting, but it is illegal to do this whilst the birds are building or using them